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Politics

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Where Have All the Rogues Gone?

*Political Mischief Isn't What It Used to Be, But
We Still Have a Few Rogues, Cranks, and Buffoons*

It's a sad state of affairs in this most political of cities: Somebody behaves in a roguish fashion at a big political dinner addressed by the Vice President, and the culprit turns out to be not a politician, but a football player.

Where have all the great political rogues gone?

When Redskin star running back John Riggins went into his now-famous monologue with Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and capped it by taking 40-plus winks on the floor at table-side, it brought tears to our eyes. It hurt to recall that 28 long years had passed since Representative T. James Tumulty of Jersey City made page one around the country by posing in white tie and tails for Dwight D. Eisenhower's second inaugural ball—without his pants on.

We've had Watergate and all that in the intervening time, but that was knavery, not roguery. Our dictionary defines a rogue as "a wandering, disorderly, or dissolute person formerly accountable only under various vagrancy acts," which falls considerably short of the leading indicted players of Richard M. Nixon's coterie.

Our dictionary also describes a rogue as "a dishonest, unprincipled person," which seems a bit harsh to us, and as "a worthless fellow," which seems too

broad, inviting the inclusion of so many members of Congress, not to mention members of the Fourth Estate.

The remaining dictionary definition is more what we have in mind when we think of a political rogue: "a pleasantly mischievous person." That is the essence of authentic roguery—the talent for saying or doing outrageous things while not hurting anybody much and without totally losing public affection.

The political firmament is studded with great political rogues of the past: the late Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois and former governor James Rhodes of Ohio among the Republicans, and Representative Adam Clayton Powell of New York and Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma among the Democrats, to name a few. Rhodes, who played golf so much that nobody noticed when he retired, may yet again enrich the political rogues' gallery by leaving the links temporarily to run again in Ohio.

And then there is former senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, always an iconoclast, now a sometime poet and lecturer living in rural Virginia. His rapier wit has been known to inflict wounds too deep to heal. A classic was his observation that fellow Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey, a mild-man-

nered and harmless man, was akin to a private sent out after the battle to shoot the wounded. McCarthy can be a charming fellow—when he is not writing cranky letters protesting observations about himself such as this one.

Enough of reminiscences. Who on the political scene today qualifies as an authentic rogue?

At the top of the list is Governor Edwards of Louisiana, who could play Gaylord Ravenal, the riverboat gambler in *Show Boat*, or Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* without a dash of grease paint. Edwards, you may remember, chartered a jet plane to fly himself and a host of Louisiana Democrats to Paris last year to celebrate his inauguration. They all paid—\$10,000 apiece.

Edwards is under indictment on charges of somewhat more serious shenanigans—lining his pockets in the amount of \$2 million in fraudulent hospital-construction deals. The 57-year-old governor has been under grand-jury investigation numerous other times, but this is the first he's been indicted. In this regard, he's like that legendary rogue who boasted he had a clean record: a hundred arrests, no convictions.

Edwards's capers make another notable rogue, former mayor Kevin White of Boston, a piker. All White did was throw

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